1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

Bilek Families that Produce a Surplus of Padi

511 256. We have briefly discussed what happens when a *bilek* family finds itself with insufficient *padi* for its normal needs; let us now consider those more fortunate households which succeed in producing a surplus. If it happens to be a year in which a high proportion of families have achieved bountiful crops it may well be decided to hold a series of rituals, and in this event almost all *bilek* families with a clear surplus will stage *gawai* of their own. After an adverse season, such as that of 1949-50, when only a very few families produce high 511 yields, this is not feasible, and instead, each household gradually disposes of its 203 surplus, either to other Iban or to Chinese traders. Each year as the time of harvest approaches, great interest is taken in the crops other families have produced, and even before the final storing (*besimpan*) takes place the identity of those *bileks* with an abundance of *padi* is well known throughout the long-house. Before long the news travels to neighbouring communities, and within a 602 few weeks of the harvest a *bilek* family with a large surplus is likely to find itself the quarry of kith and kin who have suffered poor crops and are seeking additional *padi* to meet their requirements. Sometimes importunate relatives will come from long-houses twenty and more miles away in an attempt to acquire grain, or to '*madi*'—as the Iban term it.

432 257. Interestingly enough, two quite distinct standards are observed in 435 disposing of *padi*: one for kin and other Iban, and another for Chinese or Malay traders. Occasionally grain is given to close relatives, but always on the general understanding that it will be repaid when conditions permit. To give *padi* in this way is—as the Iban put it—"equivalent to selling" ("*ulong di jual*"). It is far more usual however, for a price to be charged, even to near kin. This price varies slightly from community to community, but at Rumah Nyala in 1950, it was $1 for 5 gantangs of *padi*, or one fifth of the ruling market price. To dispose of grain at this rate is to observe the *adat lama*—the old custom of the Iban. If *padi* was sold to Chinese traders the price of $1 per gantang was followed. In contrast, husked rice (*brau*) was sold to Iban and Chinese alike at the standard market price (in 1950) of $2 per gantang.

258. To illustrate the kind of transactions which occur let us take the example of Bangi's household, which, in 1950, achieved a surplus of 430 gantangs of *padi*. By February, 1951, Rebut—Bangi's son—had disposed of some 425 gantangs of grain, partly as *padi* and partly as *brau* (i.e. rice from which the hull has been removed). The main transactions are shown below:

Surplus sold as padi:

(*a*) 90 gantangs sold to other Iban at the rate of $1 for 5 gantangs. The buyers included five other *bilek* families of Rumah Nyala, and Rebut's brother-in-law, from a neighbouring long-house.

(*b*) 75 gantangs exchanged with an Iban from another long-house for a large *bidai* mat.

(*c*) 90 gantangs given to a Chinese trader of Kapit in part payment for a brass gong, or *tawak*.

Surplus sold as brau:

(*d*) 81 gantangs sold to other Iban at the rate of $2 per gantang. The buyers included ten other *bilek* families of Rumah Nyala, one of them being the family of Bangi's brother.